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STATE FOR AF/E MBEYZEROV; AF MBITTRICK; L/LEI JLANDSIDLE

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TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL MASS MP

SUBJECT: MAURITIUS: GENERAL WARD/U.S. AFRICA COMMAND VISIT
17-18 AUGUST STRENGTHENS TIES

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CDA Virginia Blaser for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

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¶11. (C) SUMMARY: General William Ward, Commander, United States Africa Command, visited Mauritius from 17 to 18 August 2009. During his visit to Mauritius, he met with Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Minister of Foreign Affairs Arvin Boolell, and Police Commissioner Dhun Iswar Rampersad. The common themes of each meeting were piracy, terrorism, smuggling, and the proposed bilateral Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The visit marked the highest-level U.S. Military visit to Mauritius in recent memory and reaffirmed both the continuing security cooperation between the U.S. and Mauritius and the continuing U.S. interest in the region. General Ward also stressed the importance of a SOFA, while the Mauritians stressed their willingness to work long-term with the U.S. on the issue. Mauritian officials also raised their sovereignty claim over the Chagos Islands. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (SBU) General William "Kip" Ward, Commander, United States Africa Command visited Mauritius from 17 to 18 August 2009, in the highest-level U.S. Military visit to Mauritius in recent memory. During his visit to Mauritius, he met with Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Minister of Foreign Affairs Arvin Boolell, and Police Commissioner Dhun Iswar Rampersad.

Call on Police Commissioner, Coast Guard

¶13. (SBU) General Ward, Charge Blaser, and accompanying staff members met with Police Commissioner Dhun Iswar Rampersad. Other attendees were Commandant Vishal Singh Kanwar of the National Coast Guard, COL Khemraj Seervansingh of the Special Mobile Force, Deputy Commissioner of Police Tangavel Seerungun, Assistant Commissioner of Police Nalan Vuddamally and Wing Commander Shashank Misra of the Mauritius Helicopter Squad. General Ward reviewed an honor guard before the meeting began.

Police Concerns: Piracy, Terrorism

¶14. (C) During the meeting, Commissioner Rampersad announced the recent creation of a Commando Unit. Coast Guard Commandant Seervansingh thanked General Ward for the joint exercises conducted with the USS Arleigh Burke during its recent visit to Port Louis. He then emphasized increasing Mauritian concern over the incidents of piracy in the Indian Ocean and predicted that they would continue to migrate south, remarking, "We are not immune to these developments." He also voiced concern that "what happened in Mumbai could happen here." Commandant Seervansingh asked for special

equipment to help combat terrorists and pirates who may threaten Mauritius and referred to a previous equipment request. Wing Commander Misra said that Mauritius is training 47 police peacekeepers who will be capable of being deployed as a unit to help the United Nations or African Union as called upon, but said they need help from the United States to train. General Ward highlighted the importance of the proposed bilateral SOFA to make it easier to send trainers and ships to Mauritius. He emphasized, "we want to help you do your job more effectively" as "vast seas are no longer barriers" that protect nations from global threats. GEN Ward the United States looks to partner with nations willing to accept their share of responsibility in these common endeavors. When nations acknowledge their responsibilities and "step up," it helps us to prioritize resources to help, he said, noting the USG can't do it by ourselves.

PM: Piracy, Terrorism, Diego Garcia

¶ 15. (C) Following the meeting with the police commissioner, General Ward, Charge Blaser, and staff members met with Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam. Originally scheduled for only 30 minutes, the Prime Minister clearly enjoyed the discussions and drew the meeting out for over an hour. Present with the Prime Minister was his advisor and Chief of Staff Kailash Ruhee. The Prime Minister began by voicing concern over the threat of piracy and the rising cost of maritime insurance and its negative impact upon local prices. Ramgoolam then brought up the U.S. military base in Diego

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Garcia, saying he had recently spoken with Prime Minister Gordon Brown who told him that it was "up to the Americans" to decide what they want to do with the Chagos Archipelago. Ramgoolam stated that if Mauritian sovereignty over the archipelago was recognized by the U.S., Mauritius would "immediately offer it right back to the U.S. with a 100-year lease." The Charge and General Ward noted that the U.S. recognizes UK sovereignty over the Archipelago, and encouraged the GOM to continue to address concerns to the British.

Gen. Ward: Prosecute Pirates, Please

¶ 16. (C) General Ward noted that all nations have opportunities to contribute in some way to global security. Each contribution is important and follows from the unique abilities and capacities of each nation. He asked what Mauritius plans to do with pirates that are apprehended within its territorial waters. He said Mauritius has the professional capacity and the solid legal processes needed to prosecute pirates, noting that pirates will become bolder as the summer season advances. Pirates will always find their operational space, he said, and if that space is denied them in other waters, they will move to fill any space that is left untended. He urged Mauritius to "do its part," to "step up and become a global partner." He emphasized, "when countries participate, it helps us to prioritize and to justify the use of limited resources to Congress, and leads to other things such as assistance."

Gen. Ward: Don't Sit on That SOFA

¶ 17. (C) Next, General Ward turned to the proposed bilateral SOFA between the United States and Mauritius. He stressed the point that "assistance is enhanced by a SOFA." He stated that he must personally approve all visits by military personnel to countries without a SOFA and that those requests always come with some degree of risk; risk not present when a

SOFA is in place. "If we make progress on a SOFA, it will be a plus factor in other issues." Ramgoolam agreed that Mauritius wants to do its part, and strongly appreciates the assistance that has been provided so far in terms of joint training (such as in the visit by the Arleigh Burke), individual training, and the promise of the Defender boat. (NOTE: The Defender boat is scheduled for delivery within the next few months. END NOTE.) The PM affirmed his support for a completed SOFA. He also noted that during his first administration, he was the person who intervened to change the Mauritian policy of demanding a declaration of the presence of nuclear weapons on U.S. ships before they could visit (NOTE: Ramgoolam was first Prime Minister from 1995 to 2000. END NOTE.) Charge Blaser noted that Mauritius and the U.S. could resolve any specific issues during dialogue over a SOFA.

Request: Disaster Management Assistance

¶ 8. (C) During the same meeting, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff Ruhee asked if Africa Command can assist Mauritius with disaster management training. General Ward responded that his command is conducting major humanitarian relief exercises in October and noted that observer positions were available for the exercise. The U.S. delegation agreed to pass any information on these exercises to the Chief of Staff. The Prime Minister ended with his concern over H1N1 in Mauritius. General Ward answered the concern by stating that pandemics in general are an issue that must be addressed together, as "oceans don't separate us anymore."

FM: Relationship, SOFA Restrictions

¶ 9. (SBU) The following meeting was with Minister of Foreign Affairs Arvin Boolell. Also attending from the Mauritian side were Chief of Protocol Ay Yao Lam Chiou Yee, and Minister-Counselor Deepak Gokulsing, Head of Bilateral Directorate II (which covers Europe and the U.S.). The Minister opened the meeting with an acknowledgement that our "relationship is gaining momentum." The recent agreement to open Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) negotiations has

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"placed Mauritius on the map. We look forward to as much investment as possible by the U.S.," Boolell said. He noted that he had read the proposed SOFA and that he was receptive to "many" of the proposals. Visiting naval vessels, however, must be "subject to certain standards." Boolell underscored that while was receptive to the idea of a SOFA, any agreement must ensure Mauritian interests are safeguarded. General Ward stressed that "we respect the sovereignty of Mauritius," and such agreements do not threaten a nation's sovereignty. We only go where we are invited and are welcome, the General clarified. GEN Ward cited the recent visit of the Arleigh Burke and the joint training that was conducted as an example of how Mauritians must first agree to the training before US personnel enter Mauritius.

FM: Advice Noted, Let's Keep Talking

¶ 10. (C) Minister Boolell answered the General by saying that his "words encourage us to continue the dialogue process." "You have helped answer our concerns of sovereignty. We will also continue our dialogue with our British friends. We must be mindful of pitfalls and dangers of current events in the region. With the end of the Cold War, some 'ugly heads' are becoming visible: terrorism, piracy, insecurity in the region." Boolell cited illegal fishing and toxic waste as well, and the impact of the security problems on prices and

tourism. Boolell said he appreciates the United States waging war on these "scourges." He asked General Ward to please convey his thanks to the Secretary of State and to the President for their assistance.

¶11. (C) Turning to the security relationship, Boolell stressed that Mauritians are "practical," and "don't want to send any wrong signal." With "firm guarantees" and "subject to advice," the U.S. Navy is welcome to Mauritian ports. While dialogue is welcome, "we have a responsibility to speak our mind." In reference to the SOFA, the MFA reps declared they had "sought advice and advice has been tendered," but also "we will take another look and seek advice again." Besides the issues of security and piracy, the Mauritian government has the moral and legal obligation to fight for its territory, the Minister noted.

FM Will Discuss Piracy Prosecution MOU

¶12. (C) General Ward expressed his appreciation of the Minister's comments, noted the linkage of all nations, and praised the partnership between the two nations. He asked what would happen to pirates apprehended inside Mauritius' economic exclusion zone (EEZ). In light of an anticipated increase in pirate activity, Charge Blaser proposed a later meeting to discuss possible piracy prosecution cooperation via Digital Video Conferencing (DVC). The issue should be discussed before the event occurs, she stated. The Foreign minister agreed. (NOTE: The subject DVC occurred on 1 September between L/LEI and half a dozen Mauritian stakeholders. A follow on DVC is set for 17 September. END NOTE.)

Comment

¶13. (C) Positive press coverage reflected the success of General Ward's visit. Mauritius' senior leadership clearly feels the pressure from regional and national security threats such as terrorism, piracy, smuggling, and a possible influenza pandemic, in the context of a fragile global financial and economic situation. The reception given to General Ward's message shows the continuing interest in a strong bilateral relationship. The visit provided some new opportunities to reinforce existing cooperation, as well as to dispel unfounded concerns. That said, nervousness over a SOFA runs deep here, and issues surrounding Diego Garcia create a backdrop to all major security discussions, and could affect the political viability of a SOFA or even talks regarding anti-piracy cooperation. END COMMENT.

BLASER